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New Infant Toddler Specialist Network to Aid in Improving Care and Education for Georgia's Children and Providers

ATLANTA, Ga., (April 14, 2010) – Infants and toddlers depend on adults to help meet their physical, social, emotional and educational needs. Hundreds of thousands of these children are cared for outside of their homes on a regular basis prompting Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning to develop an Infant Toddler Specialist Network to ensure they are receiving the highest quality care possible.

The Infant Toddler Specialist Network aims to advance the quality of services and education for infants and toddlers from birth to age three throughout the state. Specifically, the Network is supporting the professional development of the infant toddler workforce by increasing the availability of infant toddler coursework and training. A statewide network of infant toddler specialists will be formed to aid early care and education providers. Funding for this \$1.25 million project comes from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), which requires a certain portion of the child care quality funding to be spent on infants and toddlers.

“This service is vital to thousands of professionals who serve Georgia’s youngest population,” stated Bright from the Start’s Commissioner Dr. Holly Robinson. “It really peels back the layers and goes to the heart of what it takes to give our children the best care and education at a critical time in their lives. Early brain development research shows us that many important foundations of brain development happen in the first three years, so it is crucial that they are receiving positive, targeted interaction with nurturing adults.”

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Work has already begun with Bright from the Start hosting early care and education professionals from Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, Early Head Start, military child care facilities, as well as two- and four-year college faculty, at the Trainer Institute on the WestEd Program for Infant Toddler Care (PITC) in January. PITC is a nationally recognized training program designed to improve the quality of child care services for infants and toddlers. An additional session is planned for May.

Once the Institute training is complete, the Infant Toddler Specialist Network will include:

- A network of trained, certified Infant Toddler Specialists who will work with selected child care providers serving infants and toddlers in family day care homes, child care centers and group homes.
- Integration of infant and toddler development and care giving best practices based on PITC modules into pre-service education in Georgia's two- and four-year colleges.
- The expansion of professional development opportunities to address the needs of infant and toddler providers throughout Georgia.

When the program is fully functioning, an evaluation of the network will be conducted in order to document the effect of the multi-tiered support system. For more information about the Infant Toddler Specialist Network, please contact Katherine Falen, Infant Toddler Network Manager at Katherine.Falen@dec.al.ga.gov.

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Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.al.ga.gov.